

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW REPORT ON LIVING IN POVERTY IN NEW JERSEY TO BE RELEASED AT CONFERENCE IN TRENTON

EDISON – A new report on a study by the Legal Services of New Jersey Poverty Research Institute (LSNJPRI) will be released at a half-day conference at the War Memorial in Trenton, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 16, 2010. The report, entitled “*Food, Clothing, Health or a Home? The Terrible Choices and Deprivations – and Great Courage – of New Jerseyans Who Live in Poverty,*” will be presented by its principal researchers and project coordinators, Allan Lichtenstein, LSNJPRI co-director, and Sabine Schoenbach, senior researcher and policy analyst for LSNJPRI. A panel of community providers will discuss the report’s accounts of what daily life in poverty is like, and a second panel of policy experts will respond to its recommendations concerning an enhanced public response to poverty. (Panel members are listed below.)

According to Melville D. Miller, Jr., LSNJ president, the research on which the report is based “represents by far the largest scale social science inquiry into what life is like for New Jerseyans burdened by poverty.” Study respondents included people living in true poverty (generally below 200% of the federal poverty level) as well as those with

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slightly higher incomes. “The study addresses,” said Lichtenstein, “unanswered questions about the effects of poverty on people’s lives. Through the words and accounts of people living below true poverty, it presents an unprecedented view of the stunning deprivations, the terrible choices and tradeoffs, and the vulnerability and fragility of lives endured in poverty – and the courage, resourcefulness and resilience of those who live them.”

The panel of community providers at the conference will include Lisanne Finston, executive director of Elijah’s Promise; Jackie Edwards, service area director for Emergency and Community Services of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Trenton; Linda Flores-Tober, executive director of the Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless; and Asma Chaudry, a member of the Board of Directors of Manavi. On the panel of policy experts will be Jennifer Velez, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Human Services; William M. Rodgers, III, chief economist for the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning & Public Policy; Andrea Hetling, assistant professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School; and Karen White, director of the Work and Family Program at Rutgers Center for Women and Work.

“Among the primary findings of the report to which the panelists will respond,” Schoenbach said, “are the lack of evidence supporting the ‘blame the victim’ approach; the stark contrast between the experiences of those with low incomes and those with just slightly higher incomes; the emotional consequences of living in poverty; the catastrophic

tipping points that can push vulnerable individuals and households into poverty and work to keep them there; and the inescapable fact that many people simply cannot avoid or escape poverty without outside assistance.”

The report also details findings concerning specific needs: the struggle to afford food, healthcare, child care, housing and utilities, transportation, and household necessities; and dealing with life in unsafe urban neighborhoods. It concludes with recommendations that, Miller said, “constitute a comprehensive framework for effective government engagement with poverty, suggesting guiding principles and essential characteristics.” The full text of the report will be available on the day of its release, November 16, on the LSNJ Web site, www.lsnj.org.

Legal Services of New Jersey, located in Edison, is the coordinating office for the state’s system of Legal Services programs, which provide essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people in all twenty-one counties in New Jersey. To help reduce the legal needs of those in poverty, the Poverty Research Institute conducts systemic research on the incidence, effects and other aspects of poverty in the state, and the relationships among poverty, work and public policy—and makes its findings available to the public.

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